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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2006

In Today's Papers

Pope Benedict Wins Turkish Hearts in Landmark Visit

All papers agree the visit by Pope Benedict XVI to Turkey was another gesture of reconciliation after the Pontiff infuriated the Muslim world with comments indicating he believed Islam was violent and irrational. Mainstream Hurriyet says Pope Benedict visited Hagia Sophia as a tourist and in the Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet) turned toward Mecca and prayed. The Vatican said it was a sign of respect. "The Pope, who drew great sympathy with remarks of apology to Islam and his gestures to Turkey, continued to surprise the world yesterday," says the paper. Mainstream Milliyet says at a time of rising tensions between religions, the Pope prayed together with a mufti at the Blue Mosque. The Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak calls the Pope's prayer at the mosque "the moment history was written." Papers note the Blue Mosque in Istanbul is the second mosque ever entered by any Pope after Benedict's predecessor John Paul became the first Pope to visit a mosque in Damascus in 2001.

Papers quote Istanbul's Grand Mufti Mustafa Cagrici as praising Pope Benedict, saying "Your two-day visit to Istanbul has produced an incredibly positive outcome for Turkey. We thank you." Cagrici said afterwards, "The Pope's visit and the messages he gave are creating great synergies for the dialogue between the two religions. We are very happy about the visit."

A joint declaration released following the meeting between Benedict and Bartholomew yesterday denounced the "scandalous" division in Christianity, restating their desire to overcome the 1054 Great Schism between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. Turkish papers say that in a "covert reference" to Turkey, the declaration said the EU should consider the possibility of taking in different cultures and religions while preserving its Christian roots, traditions and values.

"Ecumenical crisis," reads a front-page headline in the leftist/nationalist Cumhuriyet, "Despite Ankara, Patriarch

Bartholomew announced his claim to be ecumenical leader to the world in a joint statement released with the Pope. Responding to press questions, Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Spokesman Namik Tan said Turkey does not recognize or accept ecumenism, adding that Ankara's position concerning the matter was already known without elaborating further.

All papers note that the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly has invited Bartholomew I, as "Ecumenical Patriarch," to deliver a speech at the Council of Europe on January 22.

The Pope later held a mass at the VirginMary Church in Istanbul before meeting with the Patriarch of Turkish Armenians, Mesrob II. "A peaceful dialogue between Turkish and Armenian peoples is obligatory; it is our most important expectation," said Mesrob II.

Despite fears of large demonstrations of nationalists and Islamists, only scattered protests broke out during the visit amid tight security in Istanbul. On Friday, Pope Benedict will celebrate a mass at Istanbul's Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, which will be attended by Patriarch Bartholomew. Following the mass, the Pontiff will fly back to Rome at midday.

Cyprus Wants EU-Turkey Talks Suspended Altogether

All papers anticipate "difficult days ahead with the EU" following a partial suspension of Turkey's accession talks earlier this week. EU term president Finland's Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja told Turkish reporters the proposal would probably be changed at the December 11 meeting, without elaborating further. The Cypriot government, pressing for a tougher decision on Turkey, said "If we are not satisfied with the EU conclusions at the December 11 meeting, we will not to permit the opening of chapters of Turkey's

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accession course." Britain, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Estonia said the Greek Cypriot offer was unacceptable. Swedish foreign minister said the European Commission's proposal to partially freeze talks with Turkey on eight chapters would cause great damage. Britain and Spain have also warned against pressing Ankara too hard, while France, Germany and others want Turkey punished for its non-compliance with EU law.

Milliyet reports sources in Washington said US continues its strong support for Turkey's EU process but that the problems have to be solved among Turkey and the EU since the US is not a member of the European bloc. Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Spokesman Namik Tan said Turkey was determined to continue ties with the EU, adding that Turkish positions might be reviewed in line with the outcome of the EU summit on December 14.

Editorial Commentary on NATO Riga Summit

Writing in the Islamist-opinion maker Yeni Safak, Koray Duzgoren warns that NATO is turning into the "global gendarme" for the West: "The decision at the Riga summit was very important for the future of the world, and somehow it was downplayed in the Turkish media possibly because of the Pope's visit, and the developments regarding Turkey and the EU. The Riga summit proved that NATO is turning into the global gendarme for the West. The mission in Afghanistan was the first out-of-area duty for NATO and, with the Riga summit, the global gendarme role for the Alliance has become official. Defenders of this role are arguing that the UN mechanism has not been efficient in coping with international problems, and they believe that the globalization of the NATO mission will be a good thing. Should we believe this argument? What happens if NATO turns into an international gendarme for protecting US and EU interests under the pretext of the fight against terror? The ongoing discussion on whether to deploy NATO forces in Iraq gives enough indication. The new role for NATO does not seem to be a good one. The world is need of peace and justice not new gendarmes."

In the conservative Turkiye, Washington-based Hasan Mesut Hazar hails the globalization of NATO and Turkey's position in the organization: "The NATO summit demonstrated that the alliance is now global. The fight against terrorism has become the priority among the threats against NATO. Other threats are listed as

instability, regional conflicts and crisis as well as the expansion of conventional weapons. The redefinition of threat analysis paves the way for new changes in the alliance, including the Rapid Reaction Force, to be operational in the future. Turkey's role and importance in NATO is also growing along with this restructuring. Being the second largest army in NATO, Turkey seems to be the most valuable member. Turkey agreed to contribute to the rapid reaction force with 300 soldiers. The alliance of civilization project and its mention in the final declaration is another success for Turkey within NATO. Following the announcement of the Iraqi Working Group report on Iraq, it is expected that both US policy in Iraq and the NATO mission will change accordingly."

US Embassy: "PKK Terrorism Designation Unchanged"

Hurriyet, Vatan, Radikal and others: The US Embassy issued an announcement regarding the court ruling in California that there is no change in the US view that the PKK is a terrorist organization. Speaking at the weekly press briefing, MFA Spokesman Namik Tan said "it is an issue that has been brought on to the agenda within the framework of the unconstitutionality of a very comprehensive law." Radikal notes that Namik Tan said that the US Administration will appeal the Californian court decision.

Supreme Military Council (YAS) Convenes

All papers report that YAS convened under PM Erdogan yesterday. Military policies as well as modernization needs of the military were discussed. Disciplinary files of the military personnel were reviewed. The Council also announced that they had decided to expel 37 officers, two of them for engaging in fundamentalist activities,

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from the military. PM Erdogan and Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul noted their reservations to the expulsions under their signature, believing that the decision should be made in court. President Sezer hosted a dinner in honor of Council members, but PM Erdogan did not attend the dinner.

Five-Mile Limit for 'Dog Fights' in the Aegean

Hurriyet reports that in order to avoid dog fights between Turkish and Greek war planes in the Aegean, Turkish and Greek military officials agreed the planes would keep five miles distance between each other. Some terrible crashes occurred in the past due to planes flying as close as 200 meters to each other. This agreement was described as the most positive result of TGS Chief General Buyukanit's visit to Greece on November 1-4.

TV Highlights

NTV (6 a.m.)

Domestic News

- Tight security "paralyzed" Istanbul traffic Thursday during Pope Benedict's visit to Turkey's largest city.
- CHP deputy chairman Onur Oymen slammed the EU for using threats to get concessions from Turkey before the upcoming summit in December.
- Turkish Health Ministry declared 2,412 AIDS and/or HIV-positive cases have been recorded in Turkey since 1985, most of which are people aged between 30-34, with the majority of the infections resulting from heterosexual intercourse. Most AIDS/HIV patients live in the major Turkish cities Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara.
- Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul will host a luncheon Friday for ambassadors of the EU countries in Ankara to mark the end of Finland's EU term presidency.
- Turkish Parliament's budget commission has approved the 2007 budget draft.

International News

- EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said Croatia could join the EU before 2010.

- Prime Minister Erdogan is to visit Iran on Saturday to discuss with President Ahmedinejad and religious leader Khamenei Iraq and Tehran's nuclear activities.

- The appeals chamber of the UN war crimes court handed down an unprecedented life sentence for Bosnian Serb general Stanislav Galic.

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